

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 15, 2015

Agenda Item: 2015 Grazing and Sharecrop Leases – Amelia Island Farming Lease

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

The 86-acre Amelia Island Wildlife Management Area was purchased by FWP to maintain a riparian/cropland habitat complex for the benefit of a diversity of wildlife while enhancing public hunting opportunities. The proposed action is to continue a share-crop arrangement on 40 acres of cropland. The fields in the proposed lease area have traditionally been used for agricultural crop production. The lessee would cultivate and retain a portion (75 percent) of the crop harvest and leave the remaining crop (25 percent) standing for wildlife use in winter.

The benefit and purpose of the lease is to provide winter habitat and forage, primarily for wintering pheasants, deer, and turkeys. Standing crops and stubble also benefit migrating waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species. The use of the share-crop arrangement also helps reduce WMA management costs.

Public Involvement Process & Results

An environmental assessment was released Jan. 26, with comments accepted through March 2. No comments were received. FWP issued its decision notice on March 9 in support of the farming lease, contingent on Commission approval.

Alternatives and Analysis

Under the no action alternative, agricultural lands would not be cultivated and FWP would need to commit resources to manage weeds on the previously cultivated 40 acres of farm fields, and wildlife would be negatively impacted by the lack of wintering habitat and forage resources. Renewing the agricultural lease would benefit wildlife by providing high-quality forage and wintering habitat and continued hunting opportunity for deer and pheasant with little expense to FWP.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the farming lease on Amelia Island WMA, which would provide necessary winter forage for wildlife and promote quality public hunting opportunities.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve the agricultural lease on Amelia Island WMA.